

Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers September 24, 2003

.08 - The new definition of drunk driving in Michigan State adopts lower BAC limit

Michigan's tolerance for drunk drivers is going down, starting September 30, 2003, when .08 blood-alcohol content (BAC) becomes the new drunk driving standard. Michigan has had a two-tiered standard, with .10 BAC or greater considered drunk driving and .08 - .09 BAC being impaired driving.

A first-time offender convicted of drunk driving faces:

- ☐ Up to 93 days in jail
- ☐ Up to a \$500 fine
- ☐ Up to 360 hours of community service
- ☐ Up to 6 points on a driver license
- ☐ Up to 180 days with a suspended license with a restricted possible after 30 days

Convicted drunk drivers will also be subject to a new additional \$1,000 penalty that is included in a recently approved driver responsibility program. The \$1,000 penalty will be imposed for two consecutive years.

Fatigued Driving an Increasing Problem with Business Travelers

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that drowsiness is the primary cause of 100,000 police-reported crashes each year, resulting in at least 76,000 injuries and 1,500 deaths. With exhaustion an ever-present danger, and with more business travelers switching from air travel to driving after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and subsequent cuts in corporate travel budgets, the likelihood of becoming one of those highway statistics has only increased. Of the 569 respondents to an unscientific survey this month on the Yahoo Autos Website (www.autos.yahoo.com) who reported that they had driven a car on a business trip of at least 200 miles, 58 percent said that they had experienced drowsiness. To fight it, 48 percent said they listened to upbeat music, 45 percent rolled down the windows or turned on the air-conditioning, 39 percent drank caffeinated beverages, 10 percent talked on their cell phones and 10 percent did nothing. Only 19 percent pulled over and took a nap. (The numbers add up to more than 100 percent because many drivers tried two or more of the tactics.) Add to that all the other afflictions common to business travelers like jet lag, sleepless nights in motels, and the stress of meetings on the run, and you have a deadly formula for highway crashes.

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Driving Becoming Preferred Mode of Business Travel

Driving is increasingly becoming a preferred mode of business travel for regional trips, according to a new national business travel survey conducted for Enterprise Rent-A-Car. More than 65% of business travelers surveyed said they've taken a short-haul driving trip - 300 miles or less - in the past year. More than four out of 10 (44% of respondents) regional business travelers who drive say they're taking more driving trips than in the past. Among those taking more short-haul driving trips, top reasons included: saving money (78%); reduced flight choices (39%); and changes in company policies (38%). In addition, nearly one-third (30%) of all business travelers indicate their use of rental cars for such trips has increased over the past two years or will be increasing over the next 12 months. A total of 520 business travelers, who have taken at least four business trips in the past year, participated in the survey. Only business travelers were included in the survey.

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UK Company Car Drivers Unaware of Their Speeding

Hundreds of thousands of U.K. company car drivers could be exposing themselves to fines and penalty points for speeding because they do not know they are breaking the law. A major survey testing drivers' real-world awareness of speed limits found that 58% were not aware they were going too fast. The research, conducted by Pro-Drive, a Stafford-based fleet risk management firm and driver training specialist, tested 66 drivers over a 12-mile route. The route was seven miles of 30 mph limits, with the remaining five miles being A roads, B roads and dual carriageways. Each person was observed driving the route as part of a driver training assessment, whereby delegates were asked to drive normally so that the trainer can identify their bad habits, weaknesses and training needs. They were then asked to complete a questionnaire, and one question was "How many times do you think you exceeded the speed limit by between 10% and 19%, between 20% and 29%, and by more than 30%?" The results showed only 15% of drivers believed they had exceeded the speed limit at all, with only 6% admitting they had broken it by between 20% and 29%. No one felt they had exceeded the limit by more than 30%. However, Pro-Drive's training consultants revealed that 12% had exceeded the speed limit by more than 30%, 21% by more than 20%, and 58% by more than 10%. Graham Hurdle, managing director of Pro-Drive said, "It's not the fact that drivers are speeding which makes this survey so revealing. After all, we are used to seeing people speed during our pre-training assessment drives. What is most startling is the fact that the individuals didn't know they were speeding. This means they are not observing road signs properly, are not aware of their true braking distances and are not checking their speedometer regularly enough."

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Volvo's Senior Management Undergoes Safety Program

Volvo's senior U.K. management is to undergo driver training as part of the manufacturer's company-wide 'driving safely' program. Training will be provided by RAC Business Solutions and will include interactive laptop presentations and on-road sessions for Volvo field and fleet staff and half-day driver safety seminars for other employees. Starting this month, sessions will focus on the underlying causes of accidents, hazard awareness and risk perception and all employees will also receive an RAC Survival Driver Safety CD-ROM.

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Test to Prevent Truck Engine Brake Noise Being Presented

The National Road Transport Commission (NRTC) has developed a world-first test to identify offensive truck engine brakes in the traffic stream. The test is expected to lead to new regulations that make practical enforcement of engine brake noise possible for the first time. "Roadside enforcement of heavy vehicle noise has been very difficult up until now but this new test could change things significantly. Trucks failing the test would simply need to replace or modify their mufflers in order to pass. Tests undertaken in conjunction with truck manufacturers have proven that the manufacturers are quite capable of muffling the bark of the engine brake. "It is potentially a win-win for the community and the trucking industry - engine brakes are an important safety device and the proposed test provides a method of detecting the offenders, rather than placing arbitrary restrictions on the use of engine brakes," said NRTC Senior Project Manager Tim Eaton. The solution to one of the community's biggest gripes about the trucking industry - engine brake noise - will be outlined at a conference of transport industry leaders. "This is potentially the radar gun of engine brakes. It will give enforcement agencies the ability to detect and even photograph vehicles that are offensively noisy," said Mr. Eaton. He will outline an extensive research program that underpins the development of the new roadside test procedure at Freight Solutions 2003 in Melbourne. **For a copy of the NRTC report, visit <http://www.ntc.gov.au/ViewPage.aspx?page=A02208509300800020> and for a sample noise recording, visit <http://www.ntc.gov.au/ViewPage.aspx?page=A02208507300820020>.**

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New U.K. Fleet Solutions for Drivers with Chronic Back Pain

Almost one-third of U.K. fleets would support a driver who wanted to hand a vehicle back because it was the cause of chronic back pain. Many other companies say the new health and safety environment they are working in means they could not ignore the problem and would have to step in with solutions such as changing the seat, or offering medical help. The comments come following the launch of a major campaign to educate fleets about the problem of back pain, which costs British industry billions of pounds every year. Fleet NewsNet reported last week that the Association of Car Fleet Operators is sponsoring a leaflet which will be launched to coincide with National Back Care Week, starting on October 13. One of the recommendations the leaflet contains is for drivers to be able to hand back a vehicle if it proves too uncomfortable and there is no other solution. Research has shown that sick leave due to back pain is costing 116 million sick days and losing industry more than £5 billion a year, with company car drivers one of the most vulnerable groups because of the amount of time they spend behind the wheel, according to the transport unit at ICE Ergonomics, part of Loughborough University. Clinical back pain affects a massive 60% of drivers who cover more than 10,000 miles per year.

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Interactive Crash Simulator Website to Entice Seat Belt Use

A new road safety campaign by the U.K. Department for Transport underlines the risks people take when they don't wear a seat belt. The interactive road safety website demonstrates and describes the effects of crashing with and without a seat belt through the use of a "crash simulator," which explains the type of injury that can occur in a crash. Variables for the simulator include vehicle type, speed, and number and types of occupants. **To view the site, visit <http://www.thinkseatbelts.com/launch.html>.**

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Dots Painted on the Roadway Reduces Rear-End Collisions

Engineers at the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation have found that painting dots on the roadway to advise drivers about safe spacing can reduce the number of rear-end collisions. The agency has seen signs of success where it tested the program. "This is still, for the most part, a pilot program," said Rich Kirkpatrick, a spokesman for the state transportation department. "We're still studying the details and hope to get to the point where we set the specific criteria and take the program statewide." The idea is simple: Take a relatively vague concept, the 2-second rule, which states that drivers should stay at least 2 seconds behind the vehicle in front of them - and give it a visual reference. Signs warn motorists to be aware of aggressive drivers and to keep two dots between them and other cars. The dots, which are actually oval in shape, measure 7 1/2 feet-by-2 1/2 feet on two-lane highways and 12 feet-by-4 feet on interstates. They are spaced 115 feet apart, giving drivers an easy way to measure their safe driving distances. So far, five pilot locations have been established across the state. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has no record of any states with programs like Pennsylvania's. Kirkpatrick said a handful of other state transportation departments have asked for information, but he didn't know of any that have adopted the program.

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Driver Advocate Designed to Limited Driver Distractions

Saabs have a "Black Panel" switch that turns off all dial lights except the speedometer unless a problem like overheating or low fuel requires attention. Its purpose is to minimize distractions when the driver is facing difficult conditions, like a heavy rain at night. Chrysler and Motorola are taking that idea further, with Driver Advocate, also known as a Driver Workload Management system. Now being demonstrated in a Chrysler Town & Country minivan, the system senses high-stress situations and acts as an office assistant to hold cell phone calls and intercept unimportant messages until things calm down. To do this, the Driver Advocate adds sensors on the steering wheel to measure the driver's grip, and reads and interprets signals from other sensors, nearly all are already present in most cars today, that tell how hard the car is being driven. The level and pitch of conversations inside the automobile can be monitored, too, as well as the driver's position. When things become hectic, the system filters distractions, blocking calls and all warnings or other messages that are not critical for safety. Three buttons on the steering wheel control the Driver Advocate. When a call, navigation

instruction or computerized message is suppressed, the appropriate button lights up, and the driver can find out what has been missed by pressing it. The technology is now available to manufacturers. It could appear as early as the 2006 or 2007 model years.

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Investigation Puts the Spotlight on Crash Magnets

A hard-hitting investigation by a Scottish executive has put the spotlight on the “crash magnets” that could cost their employers millions of pounds a year. The report, compiled in conjunction with the Scottish Road Safety Campaign, found that men received seven times more convictions for excessive speed than females. They are also more likely to be driving as part of their job when they are caught. Only 18% of females claimed to drive “most days” for work, compared with 39% of males, according to the survey. The report, titled “The Speeding Driver: Who, How and Why?” warns, “A sample of police records for 2001 show most speeding offences occurred in built-up areas and that offending levels were highest during the weekday inter-peak period.” The survey, which investigated several areas including police records, household surveys, interviews with crash victims and focus groups, highlighted the importance of time management across fleets. It said, “More than half the drivers said they would drive faster when running behind schedule (58%) or when late for an appointment (57%). Also, 80% of 17 to 20-year-old males said they would drive faster if running behind schedule.”

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Consumer Model of Data Recorder Available for Personal Use

Road Safety International, a Thousand Oaks firm that has sold 10,000 of its professional-grade data recorders to paramedic, police and firefighter fleets, has now designed a cheaper consumer model for use by parents to install in their teenagers' cars. The modular components record data, such as seat-belt use, speed, hard braking, hard cornering, pedal-to-metal acceleration and throttle position, that can be uploaded to home computers using software that analyzes driving performance. **For the full story, visit** <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A45536-2003Sep8.html>.

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51 Percent of Commuters Switch Radio Stations to Hear Traffic Reports

A recent survey shows 51 percent of commuters polled in ten major U.S. markets nationwide said they switch radio stations to hear traffic reports. The Commuter Traffic Report Study, conducted by New Jersey-based Leflein Associates, showed drivers with more than a 45-minute commute are even more likely (58 percent) to switch to a particular radio station to hear a regularly scheduled traffic or information report. The study also found 71 percent of commuters spend most or all of their drive time to and from work listening to the radio. And those commuters are 69 percent more likely to listen to traffic or information reports than other reports, such as weather, sports, or business. **To view the news release from Leflein Associates, visit** http://biz.yahoo.com/prnews/030909/nytu182_1.html.

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Auto Insurance Premiums Increase More Than \$150 Over Past 18 Months

InsWeb Corp. announced the updated results for its Auto Insurance Index based on second quarter 2003 data. The Index is designed to identify and track general pricing trends of personal auto insurance. Consumers at InsWeb, and consumers shopping for auto insurance in general, continue to see their premiums increase. Since InsWeb began tracking data in the first quarter of 2000, prices have increased 54%. In addition, the InsWeb Auto Index has increased from 1.39 to 1.54, or 11%, since the fourth quarter of 2001, revealing that the typical consumer has seen premium increases of more than \$150 over the past 18 months.

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Auto Parts Industry Worried Higher Demand for Sophisticated Components Don't Necessarily Translate into Higher Profits

Your car may soon know how far it is from the vehicle in front, beep at you if you're too close, brake, tighten your seatbelt and adjust your seat so the airbags give you maximum protection if you still crash. Good news for the makers of high-tech auto electronics, and for reckless drivers, but executives in the auto parts industry are worried that higher demand for sophisticated components will not necessarily translate into higher profits. While cars are getting increasingly clever, consumers are demanding them at ever lower prices. That means higher sales for the car parts industry but more pressure on profits. Continental, which makes onboard computers that intervene to keep a car on the road if they sense the driver is losing control, expects double-digit sales growth for its electronics over the coming years but says it is too early to predict whether that will mean higher profits. The industry has long warned it faces a crisis if auto makers hit by weak demand keep forcing suppliers to charge less, with one industry expert earlier this year saying some 40 percent of publicly-listed companies in the sector in Europe, the United States and Asia, were in "financial trouble."

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Regulators Will Not Appeal a Federal Court Decision to Throw Out a Controversial Plan for Monitoring Vehicle Tire Pressure

Regulators will not appeal a federal court decision to throw out a controversial plan for monitoring vehicle tire pressure, a government spokesman said. NHTSA has instead approached the industry for updated information on the monitoring technology ordered by Congress to boost safety after the Firestone tire debacle. "We had to make a decision on how we were going to proceed and sent out letters [September 10, 2003] to auto manufacturers and to tire monitoring system suppliers," said Rae Tyson, a spokesman for the highway safety agency. Tyson said the responses due back to NHTSA by Oct. 17 will form the basis for how the government proceeds with new regulation. "We're trying to find out who's doing what and when," Tyson said. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit in New York rejected NHTSA's proposal last month to let automakers choose between two monitoring options, saying the proposal approved in 2002 was arbitrary and did not meet congressional requirements for improved tire safety.

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Ground Broke for Crash Test Facility Used to Simulate Traffic Crashes

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) broke ground for a crash-test facility that will feature advanced computer programs used to simulate traffic crashes. Two agencies within the USDOT, the FHWA and NHTSA, are continuing a decade's worth of cooperation with George Washington University in building the National Crash Analysis Center. The new crash center will be located at the university's campus in Ashburn, Va., and will research accidents involving highway infrastructure. This data will support the research by the highway administration's Turner-Fairbanks Highway Research Center, in McLean, Va., which involves vehicle-to-vehicle crash analysis. Computer simulation will be used to analyze crash effects on not only automobiles but also human operators in situations that involve roadside structures, such as guardrails, signposts and lighting towers.

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Toyota Presents Car That Can Park Itself

A car that can park itself without the driver having to touch the steering wheel, said by maker Toyota Motor Corp. to be a world first, went on sale in Japan. Toyota's new hybrid gasoline-electric Prius sedan uses electrically operated power steering and sensors that help guide the car when reversing into parking spaces. Toyota President Fujio Cho sat in the driver's seat at a demonstration laid on for the press, surprising reporters by holding his hands up as the car quickly parked itself. **For more information, view the Toyota press release at**

http://www.toyota.co.jp/IRweb/corp_info/pr/2003/0901.html.